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## FROM ROUSSEAU TO FROEBEL.

WHEN a conscientious teacher feels herself destitute of enthusiasm, she turns naturally to books for the inspiration which she does not find in the routine of her work. Enthusiasm, indeed, must have something else to feed upon besides the reiteration of detached bits of elementary knowledge interspersed with more or less practice of simple, manual arts. This need explains the frequent craze for percentages and competitive examinations. They impart a spurious kind of ardor which has, however, nothing in common with professional zeal. For we must recognize that teaching, like every other profession, has a spirit peculiar to itself. This spirit arises, not from studies *per se*, but from the relation of the teaching art to life and its purposes. Just as a lawyer uses his knowledge to secure certain advantages for his client, so the teacher uses knowledge to secure a certain result in her pupil. The possibility of this result lies not chiefly in the knowledge she imparts, but in the nature of the pupil, and it is insight into this nature that gives the teacher professional ardor and professional skill. This insight is not rare among women, who constitute the majority of our elementary teachers, but it is easily lost under the pressure of the many influences that tend to withdraw attention from the pupil and fix it upon measurable and stereotyped results. It is to counteract this tendency that educational reformers of the hour place so much stress upon the study of psychology. They do not exaggerate the importance of the subject; nevertheless the formal study of psychology is not likely to prove inspiring to an apathetic mind; indeed, its truths can be grasped and practically applied only by teachers who are in sympathy with the living spirits around them, eager to understand and to interpret their manifestations. If this sympathy be wanting or dormant the emotional nature must be stirred. Now of all writers on education Rousseau is the most moving. He affects us through

the imagination, and this he does by virtue of a remarkable power of presenting his ideas in the form of living personalities.

Consider a teacher, inert but not incapable, who chances upon the *Émile* and reads it for the first time. The teaching art, the art which she has hitherto performed as a series of aimless, disconnected exercises, is here set forth as a continuous, purposed, inspiring activity. The successive efforts of tutor and pupil arise one from the other like the incidents in a swiftly moving romance, all tending to the grand consummation, and all revealing in their progress the inner play of will and intelligence. "We do not know childhood," says Rousseau; the teacher assents. "Begin then by studying your pupils;" the injunction has become one of the commonplaces of the hour, but in this setting it takes on new significance. For the whole of the *Émile* is a study of this kind unremittingly pursued by the tutor. His method is far removed from that of the scientific observer; he is not concerned about the genesis of *Émile's* personality nor the interplay of biologic and psychic elements; he accepts the personality as a fact and sets himself with unflagging purpose to develop this personality to its full power, so that the pupil may be proof against the rush of circumstances that forever threatens to absorb or submerge the individual. Amid a thousand artifices and contradictions with which the work abounds, this unchanging purpose of the tutor stands out in vivid light, and thus by one brilliant stroke the author illustrates the meaning and scope of child-study as it pertains to the teacher and illuminates for her the initial source of her professional activity.

It is, however, as an awakener, not as a guide, that Rousseau is of lasting interest to teachers. He frees the mind from the weight of traditional rubbish and puts it upon an independent search for truth. The great lesson of the *Émile* is obvious, but it needs little discernment to discover that *Émile* himself is a fictitious being and that the conditions required for the experiment of his education are possible only in the brain that invented them.

The notion of the individual which Rousseau flung upon the

world with startling effect was destined to receive a far more profound interpretation from another reformer, whose work, separated from Rousseau's by a brief interval of time, bears to the other something of the relation of the flower to the seed.

It is perhaps unfortunate that Froebel's name is so identified with the kindergarten that it carries little weight with grade teachers. It is unfortunate also that a certain mysticism in thought and a certain obscurity of style prevent that pleasure in the mere perusal of his writings which is so powerful an attraction in a work like the *Émile*. Happily these hindrances have been greatly overcome for the American student by Hailmann's translation of Froebel's great work, the *Education of Man*.<sup>1</sup>

The central idea of this, as of Rousseau's masterpiece, is the personality of the child, but the child of Froebel's thought is the antithesis of *Émile*. Isolate him as *Émile* is isolated and he ceases to be himself. The very feelings which Rousseau ignores, the social sympathies, the vague outgoings of the soul that we name religious instinct, are the most characteristic signs of the child's inward nature; hence he can be known only through his instinctive activities under normal conditions. He will not, puppet-like, play his part in a preconceived drama of development, but will forever challenge attention by deviations from the expected course. This he does of necessity from the very energy which makes him individual—an energy which, as Froebel divines, cannot be understood until one penetrates beyond its individual manifestation to the mysterious sources from which it is derived. "Man as such," says Froebel, "must be viewed and treated as related to God, to nature, and to humanity." By the unfolding of this philosophic conception he draws the teacher to a tender and reverential regard for the child, and at the same time reveals the relation of her work to the deepest truths of the universe. Viewed in these relations, human personality assumes an aspect far transcending the latent possibility of *Émile*. It appears rather as an originating, unifying force; hence the stress

<sup>1</sup> "International Education Series," Vol. V.

that Froebel places upon doing, not that the child may learn more by doing, but may more fully realize himself.

It is well to note here that doing, in Froebel's sense, does not imply in particular manual exercises. These, in fact, he subordinates to language, of which he says, "Language is the self-active, outward expression of the inner," and again, "Language is inseparably one with the spirit." The verbal recitations that make up so large a part of our school exercises, when rightly conducted—after the manner, for instance, described by Dr. Harris,<sup>1</sup> or suggested by Dr. Dewey in a fascinating chapter on "The School and the Life of the Child"<sup>2</sup>—afford as full scope for the child's originating force as any effort with brush or tools. If the former may degenerate to a mere parrot repetition, the latter may as easily sink to the most mechanical copying.

But the purpose here is not to indicate practical applications of Froebel's principles, but rather their effect in the responsive mind. Method—the mode of approach to the child, the treatment of subjects—determines itself freely and harmoniously in proportion as the inward spirit is enlightened. Signs of this illuminating influence, this *renaissance* of the soul, meet us on every side. We recognize them in the creative impulse that is replacing the early industrial phase of our art education and in the ethical spirit which is penetrating our formal instruction. Transformations they are in the Froebelian spirit.

ANNA TOLMAN SMITH.

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<sup>1</sup>Originally in the *Report of the St. Louis Public Schools*, 1869-70, pp. 173, 174; also in the *Educational Review*, October, 1902, article "How the Good School Strengthens the Individuality of the Pupil."

<sup>2</sup>See *The School and Society*.